

# HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Principles of High-Quality Professional Development

The critical role played by professional development in any attempt to attain the goals of educational reform has been recognized and advocated at the national level. President Bush and the nation's governors cited professional development for teachers as one of the original six education goals adopted in 1989 (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory [NWREL], 1994). Goal Four states that, "By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continuous improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century."

To further delineate actions in support of this goal, the U.S. Department of Education's Professional Development Team identified 10 principles of high-quality professional development to serve as guidelines to both professional development providers and recipients. These principles reflect and embody what research identifies as best practice for professional development opportunities (Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI], 1997).

High-quality professional development:

1. Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community
2. Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
3. Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community
4. Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership
5. Enables teachers to develop further experience in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards
6. Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools
7. Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development
8. Requires substantial time and other resources
9. Is driven by a coherent long-term plan
10. Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts

Reference: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. High Quality Professional Development. Retrieved July 22, 2005. <http://www.nwrel.org/request/june98/article1.html>

## What Kind of Professional Development is Effective?

While most people recognize the need for continuing professional development, they also recognize that much of what goes on in the name of professional development does not address the true instructional needs of teachers. ESEA encourages states to ensure teachers have access to professional development that is supported by "scientifically based research." While there is little solid research on high-quality professional development, there is general consensus that effective professional development is marked by the following characteristics:

- Focuses on the intersection of content and pedagogy
- Includes opportunities for practice, research and reflection
- Is embedded in educators' jobs and takes place during the regular school schedule

- Is sustained over time
- Includes and fosters elements of collegiality and collaboration among teachers and principals.

This means that the all-too-common "one-shot" professional development seminar is of very limited value. It also means that schools and districts must be much more flexible and innovative in their school calendar and school-day schedule in order to allow for the highest-quality professional development. Simply confining professional development activities to specific teacher planning days does not provide adequate opportunity. Many experts believe a strong commitment to professional development should be a defining characteristic of the overall school culture. Schools should be "learning organizations" in which students and teachers are encouraged to take advantage of both formal and informal learning opportunities.

### **Alignment and Access**

Beyond the general characteristics of high-quality professional development, it is important to create alignment between professional development and school, district and state performance objectives. This means ensuring professional development helps teachers teach successfully to statewide student standards and enables teachers to address the diverse range of students in their classrooms. A number of states have now implemented "professional growth plans" for continuing licensure that require teachers' professional development activities to address specific deficiencies in their knowledge or skills, rather than simply accumulating a stipulated number of continuing education units or obtaining a master's degree in any field.

Ensuring broad access to providers of high-quality professional development is an important state responsibility. However, potential barriers to access must be addressed in every school and district. Namely, time must be allotted during the school week for teachers to engage their colleagues, and expertise that may not reside in the school or district must be provided. Solutions to both of these obstacles are greatly facilitated by the Internet and advances in distance-learning capacity and technology.

### **Key Policy Issues and Questions**

- Are there adequate opportunities, resources and support for professional development in your state?
- Does the professional development offered meet the criteria of effectiveness?
- Is professional development in your state aligned with student K-12 standards and standards for effective teaching?
- Are there adequate incentives to encourage teachers to pursue effective professional development?
- What can policymakers do specifically to make more time and more job-embedded opportunities for professional development available?
- How can states ensure the broadest access to high-quality professional development, even in poor and isolated districts?

Reference: ECS Education Policy Issue. Teaching Quality - Professional Development.  
Retrieved July 22, 2005 <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=129&subIssueID=64>